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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study that was conducted in order to add to the body of literature that investigates the manner in which feminist psychology is accepted among education graduate students. Graduate students (N=69) at a large public mid-western university were recruited and randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups. Participants were given the task of reading a paragraph that was critical of psychology's historical treatment of women. Each treatment group was told that the paragraph was written by one of four "authors": a radical feminist female professor; a female professor; a male professor; and a professor. Participants provided demographic data and responded to a semantic differential to assess whether perceived authorship influenced their evaluation of the "author." No significant differences were found between the four treatment groups, even when age, gender, and ethnicity were statistically controlled. These results suggest that graduate education students evaluate radical feminist professors in a non-significantly different manner than the way they evaluate professors who are not identified as feminists. (Contains 6 tables and 22 references.) (Author/MKA)

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RUNNING HEAD: FEMINIST AUTHORSHIP PERCEPTIONS

Influence of a Message's Reception as a Function of
Perceived Feminist Authorship

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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to add to the body of literature that investigates the manner in which feminist psychology is accepted among education graduate students. Sixty-nine graduate students at a large public mid-western university were recruited and randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups. Participants were given the task of reading a paragraph that is critical of psychology's historical treatment of women. Each treatment group was told that the paragraph was written by one of the following four "authors": 1) a radical feminist female professor; 2) a female professor; 3) a male professor; and, 4) a professor. Participants provided demographic data and responded to a semantic differential to assess whether perceived authorship influenced subject's evaluation of the "author". No significant differences were found between the four treatment groups, even when age, gender and ethnicity were statistically controlled. These results suggest that graduate education students evaluate radical feminist professors in a non-significantly different manner than the way they evaluate professors who are not identified as feminists.

Influence of a Message's Reception as a Function of Perceived Feminist Authorship

Introduction

Since the founding of the American Psychological Association's (APA) Division 35 (Psychology of Women) in 1973, the study of women's issues has been one area of diversity that has received increasing attention. Division 35 actively encourages research in women's issues and the inclusion of women's issues in the curriculum of APA approved psychology graduate and undergraduate programs. Examples of this emphasis include the benchmark text Psychotherapy for women: Treatment toward equality by Rawlings and Carter (1977), the adaptation by Division 17 (Counseling Psychology) of specific principles to be used when counseling women (Fitzgerald and Nutt, 1986), and the commitment to diversity expressed at the 1999 APA's Annual Convention held in Boston, MA. These and many other advances in the study and equalization of women are in large part a reflection of the feminist movement within the ranks of professional psychology.

Despite these advances of feminist research among the ranks of psychologists, the appeal of feminism appears to be mixed among college student populations. Research in the mid-1980's indicated that potential clients responded more positively to descriptions of traditional counseling than to feminist forms of counseling (Lewis, Davis and Lesmeister, 1983; Schneider, 1985). Epperson and Lewis (1987) reported that participants in their study preferred a traditional counselor to a feminist counselor. It appears that in the mid-1980's, the available research involving written descriptions of counseling services suggested that a negative relationship existed between statements of feminist orientation and the perceived efficacy of feminist counselors among potential client college students.

Enns and Hackett (1993) provided some preliminary evidence that this trend may be shifting in the 1990's. These researchers reported that non-client college women demonstrated no significant differences in their preferences for nonsexist-humanistic, liberal feminist, and radical feminist therapists. The results of this study seem to suggest that women college students may respond in a similar fashion to the various categories of feminism (e.g. liberal, cultural, social, and radical; Enns, 1993); however, the manner in which male college students view feminism is unclear. Enns and Hackett hypothesized that there may be an interaction effect between age and female college students' willingness to show preferences for feminist

therapy. These investigators suggested that the longer a female attends college, the more likely she may be to become aware of the influence of sexism in women's lives. Despite the progress that it suggested by Enns and Hackett, some feminist counselors remain reluctant to use the label "feminist" because of the unpopular stereotypes associated with feminism (Enns, 1997).

The present study was conducted to examine the effects of labeling oneself as a feminist in an educational setting. The present researchers were particularly interested in determining whether education students would produce similar results seen in non-client therapy studies. Specifically, the researchers wanted to examine whether graduate students enrolled in a college of education would evaluate differently a written paragraph about the psychology of women based on whether they understood the authorship of the paragraph to be ascribed to either a "radical feminist female professor," a "female professor," a "male professor," or a "professor." Based on previous research, it was expected that the "radical feminist female professor" condition would be the least well evaluated, followed by "female professor condition" and "male professor condition." Also, the investigators were interested in determining whether there was any evidence of interaction between the following variables: condition, age, gender, and ethnicity.

This research is useful to determine whether the data indicating a mixed appeal of feminist therapy among non-client college students is generalizable to other settings. Because it is likely that students will pass through the doors of a college of education in larger numbers than will experience therapy at college counseling centers, the students in this study are more likely to be representative of their college student peers. And because graduates of colleges of education who find teaching positions hold a great deal of potential to influence societal change, it is especially important to understand how receptive these students are to feminist ideology.

Method

Subjects:

Graduate students enrolled in courses offered at a large, mid-western, urban university's college of education were asked to participate in this study. A total of 69 of the 70 students that we approached agreed to participate (98.6%). The students' mean age was 31.04 years ($SD = 7.93$, range = 22-54). Seventy-seven percent of the participants were female ($n = 53$) and 23% were men ($n = 16$). Eighty-four

percent of the participants indicated that they were European American ($n = 58$) 11.6% were African American ($n = 8$), 2.9% were Hispanic ($n = 2$) and 1.4% were Asian American ($n = 1$).

Procedure

All participants signed informed consent statements and were randomly assigned to one of the four professor conditions. Upon completing the experiment the participants returned their completed material to the principle researcher. Class time was then used to discuss the purpose of the research and the manner in which the data would be analyzed. The students were given the opportunity to discuss their experience as a participant, ask questions about the process, and make suggestions about how the experiment might be strengthened in the future. Following this discussion, the researchers took care to protect the subject's anonymity by storing the subject's data securely and separately from their signed informed consent statements.

Instrument

Participants' instructions told them that the following paragraph was written by one of the following four conditions: a "radical female feminist professor" (condition #1: C1), a "female professor" (condition #2: C2), a "male professor" (condition #3: C3), and a "professor" (condition #4: C4). They were asked to read the following paragraph, which is a combination of two partial paragraphs from Naomi Weisstein (1992).

It is an interesting but limited exercise to show that psychologists embrace the sexist norms of our culture. Psychology has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, essentially because psychology does not know. The central assumption for most psychologists of human personality has been that human behavior rests on individual and inner dynamics, perhaps fixed in infancy, perhaps fixed by genitalia, perhaps simply arranged in a rather immovable cognitive network. However, the evidence is collecting that what a person does, and who she believes herself to be will, in general, be a function of what people around her expect her to be, and what the overall situation in which she is in implies that she is.

Following this reading, the directions asked the participants to demonstrate their feelings about the writer's arguments using the semantic differential (SD). The SD has been used in a number of studies

investigating attitudes toward target participants (e.g. Barnes, 1999; Hatta et al., 1999; Kee, Minick, Plene-Connor, 1999; Nikolaichuk, Jeven, and Maguire, 1999; Osgood, Suci, and Tennebaum, 1978). The advantages of using the SD include the speed of subject completion time and the replicability of the SD's underlying factor structure. Recruiting participants is made easier if they know that they will only be responsible for the briefest amount of time necessary. Also, a brief, but thorough, instrument is preferable over longer measures in order to avoid subject boredom and consequent bias in their responses.

Three underlying factors have been repeatedly found when using the SD. These three factors have been labeled "evaluative," "potency," and "activity." The "evaluative" factor has also been described as a measure of participants' attitudes toward a stimulus (Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey, 1962; Ostrom, 1969).

The nine bipolar scales on the SD are arranged in a Likert-style format with a total of seven spaces separating each scales' stimuli. The instructions tasked the participants with marking an "x" in the space that most closely resembled their perspective of the "author's" statements for each of the nine scales. The scales were: 1) fair-unfair; 2) worthless-valuable; 3) good-bad; 4) far-near; 5) boring-interesting; 6) unfamiliar-familiar; 7) believable-unbelievable; 8) important-unimportant; and 9) superficial-profound. Scales 1, 3, 7, and 8 were scored 7 to 1 from left to right. Scales 2, 4, 5, 6, and 9 were scored 1 to 7 from left to right in order to discourage subject response bias. A score of "1" indicates a favorable response to the "author" while a score of "7" is considered to be unfavorable. A "4" is interpreted as "neutral." Participants were also asked to indicate their gender (male or female), their age, and their ethnicity (African American, Asian American, European American, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, or Other).

Research Design

The research design used in this study is a true experimental design which has been called "The Posttest-Only Control Group Design" or Design 6 (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). This design insures total internal validity. The Posttest-Only Control Group Design is the most appropriate design for this study for two reasons. First, testing participants' attitudes towards feminism in a pre-test manner would likely alert them to the nature of the study and thus present a potential confound. Second, this design is the most convenient method for maintaining participant anonymity, which is important in this study as a tool to discourage faking-good.

Data Analysis:

Descriptive Statistics: Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the 9 SD scales. These appear in Table 1.

Insert table 1 here

As can be seen in table 1, for all scales except "profound-superficial," these participants scored on the positive end of the Semantic Differential.

Factor Analysis: Principle components (Nunnally, 1967) were used with 1's in the diagonal with varimax rotation using the SAS statistical program. Varimax orthogonal rotations increase the interpretability of the factors by rotating them to simple structure (Stevens, 1996; Kaiser, 1960). Three factors had Eigen values of greater than or equal to one. These factors are similar to those found in previous research (Osgood, Suci, & Tennebaum, 1978) and as such were labeled "potency," "evaluative," and "activity" respectively. The factor loadings for each variable and the variance explained by each factor are presented in table 2.

Insert table 2 here

Based on these factor loadings, we included the scales "fair-unfair," "good-bad," "believable-unbelievable," and "profound-superficial" in the construction of the evaluative factor.

Regression Analysis: The resulting salient factors were then used to calculate the factor scores that were used as predictor variables in regression equations to test the effects of the experimental condition controlling for age, ethnicity, and gender as well as the interaction of these variables (McNeil, Newman & Kelly, 1996; Newman & Benz, 1983). We first tested for "professor" condition predicting "author" evaluation factor score. The parameter estimates, the calculated R^2_{full} , the F, and the *P* value are presented in table 3.

Insert table 3 here

The non-significant F-value for this hypothesis indicated that no significant differences were found between the 4 conditions in the manner in which they evaluated the "author" stimulus person.

Next, the researchers tested for conditionXgender interaction in predicting "author" evaluation factor score. Table 4 shows the parameter estimates, the calculated R^2_{full} , the F, and the *P* value.

Insert table 4 here

The non-significant F-value for interaction of condition and gender indicated that no significant differences were found between manner in which females and males evaluated the "author" stimulus person.

Next, the investigators sought to test for conditionXage interaction in predicting "author" evaluation factor score. Table 5 presents the parameter estimates, the calculated R^2_{full} , the F, and the *P* value.

Insert table 5 here

Because the F-value for the genderXage interaction was non-significant the researchers concluded that age did not make a difference in the way in which these participants evaluated the "author" stimulus person.

Next, we wanted to test for conditionXethnicity interaction to see if the ethnic groups represented in this sample viewed the treatment conditions differently. Because there were not enough participants in the Hispanic and Asian American groups, only participants who indicated that their ethnicity was African American (AA) or European American (EA) were included in this analysis. Table 6 shows the parameter estimates, the calculated R^2_{full} , the F, and the *P* value for the conditionXethnicity interaction regression formula.

Insert table 6 here

It appears from this analysis that the African American and European American participants in this study do not differentially evaluate the four treatment conditions.

Discussion

The data analysis indicates that the graduate education students in this study did not evaluate comments from any of the four "author" conditions in a significantly different manner. Contrary to our

prediction, the "radical feminist female professor" was not significantly evaluated less positively than any of the other 3 "author" conditions. Additionally, the "male professor" condition was not evaluated more positively than any of the other "author" stimulus conditions.

Post-hoc analyses were conducted to test whether there were significant differences between the treatment conditions and the interaction of the treatment conditions with age, ethnicity and gender when predicting the remaining two factors ("potency" and "activity"). The "potency" factor consisted of the following scales: "interesting-boring," "familiar-unfamiliar," and "important-unimportant". The "activity" factor was made up of only the "near-far" Semantic Differential scale. The "valuable-worthless" scale did not load cleanly on only one factor. No significant F-values were found for any of the regression analyses predicting "potency" or "activity."

These results are in contrast to findings in the psychology literature which suggests that potential clients negatively evaluate therapists who label themselves as feminist. There are several possible explanations for these differences:

- 1) It is possible that national attitudes towards feminism have changed such that what once was considered as fringe element thinking has now become to considered more mainstream.
- 2) As in previous research, the participants in this study were not actual therapy clients. However, our participants were asked to evaluate comments made by "professors" and not potential therapists. It may be that this population would have evaluated the same comments differently if we had included a "therapist" condition.
- 3) While we found no age effects when predicting evaluation of the professors, it may be that our participants, whose mean age is greater than the mean age of participants in previous investigations, have, by virtue of their age, education level, and life experience, developed a greater level of acceptance for feminism than participants from previous investigations.
- 4) Our population was predominantly female. Although we controlled for gender when predicting evaluation of the professor's comments, it may be possible that a more evenly distributed male sample could have influence the outcome.

- 5) It is also possible that the graduate education students in this sample tended to be more open to and accepting of feminism than their university student peers. Educated women tend to score higher on masculinity scales. And, educated males tend to score higher on femininity scales.

Suggestions for future research include increasing the sample size and including a greater number of male students. It would be helpful to replicate this study using an undergraduate and graduate education student population to determine if years of education predict evaluation of feminism. To gain a greater understanding of the subject's evaluative process in the "professor" condition, it would be helpful to include a question that asks the participants to identify which gender they thought the "author" was. It is further suggested that future treatment of this topic include a question asking participants whether they would ever consider discussing a personal problem with the professor. Finally, it would be helpful to gain insight into how the sample defined "radical feminist." It is possible that the participants in the "radical feminist female professor" condition had different ideas of what radical feminism means as they completed the semantic differential.

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Table 1

Semantic Differential Scale Means, Standard Deviations, and Range of Scores									
	Fair	Valuable	Good	Near	Interesting	Familiar	Believable	Important	Profound
Mean	3.32	3.22	3.13	3.96	2.88	3.55	3.36	3.29	4.23
SD	1.36	1.3	1.14	1.08	1.44	1.65	1.34	1.27	1.23
Range	1-7	1-7	1-5	2-6	2-6	1-7	1-7	1-6	1-7

Table 2

Semantic Differential Variable Factor Loadings

Factor	Fair	Valuable	Good	Near	Interesting	Familiar	Believable	Important	Profound
Potency	0.35243	0.46207	0.25423	0.0471	0.82497	0.77365	0.53181	0.69825	-0.3737
Evaluation	0.68348	0.22032	0.78144	0.00282	0.13842	0.03178	0.72984	0.44988	0.75108
Activity	0.27776	0.54075	-0.2137	0.88694	0.0883	0.11421	0.0787	0.05844	0.28515

Note: Eigen value for Potency = 2.593715. Eigen value for Evaluation = 2.445695. Eigen value for Activity = 1.313659

Table 3

Models, F-Ratios, and R-squares for Conditions Predicting Evaluation

Models		R-Square	df	F	<i>p</i>
Yevaluation = (15.362)u + (.003)age + (-.039)ethnicity + (-1.977)gender + (-1.803)condition #1 + (-.346)condition #2 + (-1.184)condition #3 + Error	Full	0.0844	6/62	0.952	0.4649
Test condition#1 = condition#2 = condition#3	Restrict		2/62	0.5913	0.5567

Note: condition 1 = radical female feminist professor, condition 2 = female professor, condition 3 = male professor,
condition 4 = professor.

Table 4

Model, F-Ratio, and R-squares for Gender Predicting Evaluation					
Models		R-Square	df	F	p
Yevaluation = (14.923)u = (-2.923)condition1*males + (-6.256)conditon2*males + (-1.423)condition3*males + (-.173)condition4*males + (-1.538)condition1*females + (1.005)condition2*females + (-1.154)condition3*females + Error	Full	0.1696	7/61	1.78	0.1077
Test condition#1*males - condition#1*females = condition#2*males - condition#2*females = condition#3*males - condition#3*females = condition#4*males	Restrict		3/61	2.0891	0.1109

Note: condition 1 = radical female feminist professor, condition 2 = female professor, condition 3 = male professor, condition 4 = professor.

Table 5

Model, F-Ratio, and R-squares for Age Predicting Evaluation					
Models		R-Square	df	F	p
Yevaluation = (12.776)u + (3.576)condition1 + (-5.485)condition2 + (4.043)condition3 + (-.109)condition1*age + (.253)condition2*age + (-.095)condition3*age + (.066)condition*age + Error	Full	0.118	7/61	1.152	0.3438
Test condition#1*age = condition#2*age = condition#3*age = condition#4*age	Restrict		3/61	1.7773	0.1609

Note: condition 1 = radical female feminist professor, condition 2 = female professor, condition 3 = male professor, condition 4 = professor.

Table 6

Model, F-Ratio, and R-squares for Ethnicity Predicting Evaluation					
Models		R-Square	df	F	p
Yevaluation = (15.667)u + (-2.333)Condition1*AA + (-4.167)Condition2*AA + (-2.667)Condition3*AA + (4.333)Condition4*AA + (-2.733)Condition1*EA + (-.381)Condition2*EA + (-2.436)Condition3*EA + (-1.104)Condition4*EA + Error	Full	0.1081	8/60	0.909	0.5149
Test condition#1*AA - condition#1*EA = condition#2*AA - condition#2*EA = condition#3*AA - condition#3*EA = condition#4*AA - condition#4*EA =	Restrict		3/60	1.1435	0.3389

Note: condition 1 = radical female feminist professor, condition 2 = female professor, condition 3 = male professor,
condition 4 = professor. AA = African American, EA = European American.